

Name _____

Date _____

Berlin Airlift Role-Play Activity

Historical Context: WWII ended in 1945 when Germany and Japan surrendered. The only two nations with large armies and developed economies were the United States and the Soviet Union. The other mother countries (France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan) suffered during the Great Depression and World War II. Because the US and USSR were the most powerful nations, who had their armies and navies scattered around Europe, they were called “superpowers”. The USA had saved Western Europe, the Soviet Union had saved Eastern Europe, but they saw the world very differently – the USA wanted capitalist democracies to dominate the world, whereas the USSR wanted Communist dictatorships.

Directions: Based on your different roles as Joseph Stalin or Harry Truman, how would you handle each situation?

Roles

Stalin: You are Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union. Your army conquered Eastern Europe and most of Germany during World War II while 25 million Russians died. Now, Soviet soldiers are in every Eastern European country, and you want to keep them there to make sure Germany never invades anyone again. This is also an opportunity to spread Communism (how convenient!). Before WWII, the capitalist economies in Eastern Europe resulted in under-paid workers and rich capitalists who did not care for them. Like Karl Marx said, the workers have nothing to lose but their chains, and World War II destroyed all the chains in Eastern Europe – their governments, factories, economic classes, and economy. Now you can rebuild Eastern Europe as a socialist paradise – where government owns everything and supports the people’s needs. But this will be tough – Western Europe is capitalist AND allied with the United States – Western Europeans buy and sell products that just waste money and create addiction to material objects and pointless fun. You can’t let the Eastern Europeans run to that kind of life – they will abandon the socialist/communist dream and it will fail. If Communism fails, we will be back to capitalism, where the rich exploit the poor.

Truman: You are Harry S. Truman, President of the United States. You are worried about the Soviet Union – they have taken control of all of Eastern Europe with their massive army. You want those nations in Eastern Europe to be capitalist, and you offered them money (The Marshall Plan) to rebuild, but the Soviet Union won’t let them accept it. And they are forcing those nations by using their huge army – they have 6 million soldiers, compared to the US army of only 1 million soldiers. However, the US has a weapon that the Soviets don’t - the atomic bomb. You showed the world what kind of power the US army has at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Plus you have one other advantage – your capitalist economy is always growing and trading with other societies. The Soviet Union produces necessary goods and services and does not have a variety of brands and products, but the US market economy allows for competition, so there are dozens of car, toy, candy, clothing, machine, hygiene, and food companies that all make products people want to buy. You can sell the world their goods and make the US rich, that way you will stay ahead of the Soviets.

Situation 1: At the end of WWII, Berlin, Germany is destroyed. The Soviet army took control of the city in 1945, but wouldn't let the other Allied armies in for 2 months. During that time, they stripped Berlin of anything useful – factory parts, tools, weapons, copper wires and pipes – as a form of reparations for the damage caused to the Soviet Union when Germany invaded in 1941. The Soviets created a temporary government in Berlin until the Allies could figure out what to do with it. However, there were numerous problems. “Each of the 87 sewage systems was inoperable. The network of pumps for drinking water had been largely destroyed. As a result, dysentery and typhus quickly spread among the population...only 2,400 doctors from a previous pool of 6,500 remained on the job, while of the former 33,000 hospital beds, only 8,500 could be used.(11)”¹ And there was a huge food shortage, as Berlin received food from the farms outside the city. Over 2 million Berliners need help. What should you do?

If I was Stalin, based on my communist beliefs, I would _____

If I was Truman, based on my capitalist beliefs, I would _____

¹ Source: Charles F. Pennacchio, "The East German Communists and the Origins of the Berlin Blockade Crisis," *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 29, no. 3 (Fall 1995) <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/penna.htm> (adapted)



Situation 2: By 1948, East and West Berlin look very different. The Soviet Union wanted to rebuild their destroyed cities, so they demanded reparations from East Germany, took supplies from East Berlin, and forced educated Germans to relocate to Russian territory and help rebuild. Besides that, the Soviet soldiers have been so abusive to German and East Berlin citizens that the East Germans hate the communists and the Soviet soldiers. West Germany was different – the United States began the **Marshall Plan**, whereby the US would give economic aid (money and loans) to help rebuild West Berlin and any European nation who wanted it. The Soviet Union refused the money and did not allow any of its satellite states (nations that it controlled in Eastern Europe) to accept the money either. Stalin saw this as a bribe for nations to get on the American’s side. Stalin has another problem – people in East Germany and East Berlin keep escaping to West Berlin and other nations in Western Europe. If you were Stalin, what would you do?



If I was Stalin, based on my communist beliefs, I would _____

Situation 3: In June 1947, after two years of capitalist development of the French, British, and American sections, they combined to form West Germany. Joseph Stalin then stopped all trains, cars, and trucks from entering Berlin (since Berlin was in East Germany). This was called the Berlin Blockade. Stalin also shut off the electricity for West Berlin (the area controlled by France, Britain, and the USA). He wanted to make those governments leave Germany so it could become Communist. But the West Berliners only have enough food and fuel to last them one month, and all the roads and railroads are closed – nothing gets in or out of Berlin on land routes. Stalin is taking a big risk with this blockade, he might start a war between the Soviet Union and the United States. If you were President Harry S. Truman, what would you do?



If I was Truman, I would _____

What Truman/The United States actually did for West Berlin: _____

Situation 4: The Berlin airlift has begun. The United States decided to fly planes over the Soviet Union's East German territory into West Berlin. They are delivering necessary items like coal, wheat, flour, butter, and clothes to the West Berliners. One of the planes is dropping chocolate bars in little packages for the kids – needless to say, the Germans love the United States right now. And the Soviet Union looks weak – they tried to block the United States, and it failed. Now you, Stalin, have several options: 1) You can back down, and open the railroads and roads into West Berlin, and give in to the Allies, 2) You can start shooting down the planes and potentially start a war, 3) You can allow East Berlin, East Germany, and all the Soviet Satellite States to receive aid from the United States, which would make you look bad, but it will cost the United States a ton of money. What would you do?



If I was Stalin, I would _____

What Stalin/the Soviet Union actually did: _____

Based on the video clip (<http://www.history.com/topics/berlin-wall/videos#deconstructing-history-berlin-wall>), what did the Soviet Union do during the 1950s/60s as a reaction to the Berlin Blockade and Airlift?

Why do you think the Soviet Union did this? _____
